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The Black Cat

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The Family Skeleton's Wedding Journey.
$125 Prize Story.
Annie Fellows Johnston.

A Million-Dollar Cinder.
Will N. Harben.

The Luck of William the Angel.
Paul Shoup.

The Warden's Overcoat.
Grace Gorrill Gowing.

The Trade Rat Mine.
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The Black Cat

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The Family Skeleton's Wedding Journey.*

BY ANNIE FELLOWS JOHNSTON.

NO matter what kind of a procession paraded the streets of Gentryville, one unique tailpiece always brought up the rear. As the music of the band died away in the distance, and the pomp of the pageant dwindled down to the last straggling end, necks about to be relieved of their long tension invariably turned for one more look. It was then that old Gid Wiggan drove by in his Wild-cat Liniment wagon, as unfailing as the Z that ends the alphabet.

Lank and stoop-shouldered, with a long, thin beard that reached his lap, and a high, bell-crowned hat pulled down to meet his flabby, protruding ears, he of himself was enough to provoke a laugh; but added to this he bore aloft on a pole the insignia that proclaimed his calling. It was a stuffed wild-cat, shelf-worn and weather-beaten, glaring with primeval fierceness with its one glass eye, and wearing a ridiculously meek expression on the side that had been bereft.

Across the ribs of the old black horse that drew the wagon was painted in white letters, "Wiggan's Wild-cat Liniment"; but as

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if this were not advertisement enough, the proprietor sowed little hand-bills through the crowd, guaranteeing that the liniment (made from the fat of the animal) would cure any ache in the whole category of human ills. He had followed in the wake of the Gentryville processions so many years that he had come to be regarded as much a matter of course as the drum-major or the clown. Civic or military, the occasion made no difference. He followed a circus as impartially as he came after the troops reviewing before the Governor's stand, and he had been known to follow even one lone band-wagon through the town, on its mission of advertising a minstrel troupe.

There must have been something in the geography of the Wiggan family corresponding to a water-shed, else his course in life could not have differed so widely from his brother's. They had drifted as far apart as twin raindrops, fated to find an outlet in opposite seas. Indeed, so great was the difference that the daughters of the Hon. Joseph Churchill Wiggan (distinct accent on the last syllable when referring to them) scarcely felt it incumbent upon them to give his brother Gideon the title of uncle.

To Louise and Maud the proper accentuation of their family name was vital, since it seemed to put up a sort of bar between them and the grotesque liniment peddler. The townspeople always emphasized the first syllable in speaking of him.

The brothers had turned their backs upon each other, even in the building of their houses. While only an alley separated their stables in the rear, the Hon. Joseph's mansion looked out on a spacious avenue, and old Gid's cottage faced a dingy tenement street. He had his laboratory in the loft of his stable, from the windows of which he could overlook his brother's back premises.

Maud and Louise, regarding him and his business in the light of a family skeleton, ignored him as completely as a family skeleton can be ignored when it is of the kind that will not stay in its allotted closet. It seemed to meet them every time they opened their palatial front door. They could not turn a street corner without coming upon it. Only the ultra-sensitive young lady just home from the most select of fashionable schools can know the pangs that it cost Louise to see her family name staring at her in white letters from the bony sides of that old horse, in connection

with a patent medicine advertisement; and the faintest whiff of any volatile oil suggesting liniment was enough to elevate Maud's aristocratic nose to the highest degree of scorn and disgust. Once, years ago, when the girls were too young to be ashamed of their eccentric kinsman, they had visited his laboratory out of childish curiosity. He had given them peanuts from a pocket redolent with liniment, and had asked them to come again, but they had had no occasion to repeat the visit until after they were grown.

It was the night before Louise's wedding day. They had both finished dressing for the evening, but, not quite satisfied with her appearance, Louise still stood before the mirror. She was trying to decide how to wear one of the roses which she had just shaken out of the great bunch on her dressing table. Ordinarily she would not have hesitated, for there was nothing she could do or wear that would not be admired by this little Western town. It was the card accompanying the roses which made her pause — the correct, elegant little card, engraved simply, "Mr. Edward Van Harlem." It seemed to confront her with the critical stare of the most formal New York aristocracy, coldly questioning her ability to live up to it and its traditions.

That the Van Harlems had violently opposed their son's marrying outside their own select circle she well knew. His mother could not forgive him, but he was her idol, and she was following him to his marriage as she would have followed to his martyrdom. By this time she was probably in Gentryville, at the hotel. She had refused to meet Louise until the next day.

Louise laid the great, leafy-stemmed rose against the white dress she wore. It was a beautiful picture that her mirror showed her, and for an instant there was a certain proud lifting of the girlish head; a gesture not unworthy the haughty Mrs. Van Harlem herself. But the next moment a tender light shone in her eyes, as if some sudden memory had banished the thought of the Knickerbocker displeasure.

The maid had brought in the evening paper, and Maud, picking it up, began reading the headlines aloud. Louise scarcely heard her. When one's lover is coming before the little cuckoo in the clock has time to call out another hour, what possible interest can press dispatches hold?

She laid the velvety petals against her warm cheek, and then softly touched them to her lips. At that, her own reflection in the mirror seemed to look at her with such a conscious smile that she glanced over her shoulder to see if her sister had been a witness too. As she did so, Maud dropped the paper with a horrified groan.

"Oh, Louise!" she cried. "What shall we do? There's to be an industrial parade to-morrow morning, with dozens of floats. The line of march is directly past the Continental Hotel. What will Mrs. Van Harlem say when she sees Uncle Gid's wagon and our name in the Wiggan Wild-cat advertisement?"

Louise dropped weakly into a chair, echoing her sister's groan. The color had entirely left her face. She was more in awe of her patrician lover and his family than she had acknowledged, even to herself.

"Think of that awful, old moth-eaten wild-cat on a pole!" giggled Maud, hysterically.

"Think of Uncle Gid himself!" almost shrieked Louise. "It would kill me to have him pointed out to the Van Harlems as father's brother, and somebody will be sure to do it. There's always somebody mean enough to do such things."

Maud pushed aside the curtain and peered out into the June twilight, now so dim that the street lamps had begun to glimmer through the dusk.

"If we could only shut him up somewhere," she suggested. "Lock him down cellar — by accident — until after the parade, then he couldn't possibly disgrace us."

There was a long silence. Then Maud, dropping the curtain on the dusk of the outer world, turned from the window and came dancing back into the middle of the brightly lighted room.

"I've thought of a plan," she cried, jubilantly. "We can't do anything with Uncle Gid, but if the wild-cat and harness could be hidden until after the parade, that would keep him safely at home, hunting for them."

Louise caught at the suggestion eagerly, but immediately sank back with a despairing sigh. "It's of no use!" she exclaimed. "There's no one whom we could trust to send. If Uncle Gid should have the faintest suspicion of such a plot, there is nothing

too dreadful for him to attempt in retaliation. He'd just as lief bring up the rear of the wedding procession itself with that disreputable old beast on a pole, if he thought it would humble our pride."

As she spoke, she again caught sight of the little card that had come with the roses. It nerved her to sudden action. "I must go myself," she cried, desperately, springing up from her chair.

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Maud, "you're surely joking. It's pitch dark in the stable by this time. Besides you might meet some one—"

"It's my only salvation," answered Louise, with an excited tremor in her voice. "Oh, you don't know the Van Harlems! Come on, Sis, and help me, that's a dear. It will be our last lark together."

"And our first one of this kind," answered Maud, drawing back. "Edward will be here in a few minutes, and—"

"All the more reason for us to hurry," interrupted Louise, taking a candle from the silver sconce on her dressing table, and snatching up some matches. "Come on!"

Carried away by her sister's impetuosity, Maud followed softly down the back stairs and across the tennis court. In their white dresses they glimmered through the dusk like ghosts. They were laughing under their breath when they started out, but as they crossed the dark alley they looked around nervously, and clutched each other like frightened schoolgirls.

Ten minutes later they were stealing up the back stairs again, carrying something between them wrapped in Maud's white petticoat. She had taken it off and wrapped it around the beast to avoid touching it. They had not been able to find a safe hiding place in the stable, and in sheer desperation had decided to carry it home with them for the night. A strong odor of liniment followed in their wake, for Louise, in her frantic haste, had upset a bottle all over the wild-cat, and liberally spattered herself with the pungent, oily mixture.

As they hurried up the stairs, the cook suddenly opened the door into the back hall, sending a stream of light across them from the kitchen. There was a look of amazement on her startled face as she recognized her young mistresses coming in the back way at

such an hour, but she was too well trained to say anything. She only sniffed questioningly as the strange smell reached her nostrils, then shut the door.

Just as the girls reached the head of the stairs there was a loud ring of the front door-bell. "Edward!" exclaimed Louise, helplessly letting her end of the bundle slip.

"Run and change your dress," said Maud. "You are all cobwebs and soot from dragging that harness into the coal-cellar. I'll attend to this."

Opening the door into a little trunk room at the end of the hall, she dragged her burden inside. An empty dress-box on the floor suggested an easy way of disposing of it. But when she had stuffed it in, still wrapped in the petticoat, not satisfied as to its secrecy, she opened an empty trunk and lifted the box into that. As she passed her sister's door Louise called her.

"Here!" she said, despairingly, holding out both hands. "We might as well give up. Smell!"

Maud's nose went up in air. "Liniment!" she exclaimed, solemnly. "Yes, it's fate. We can't get away from it."

"Edward will wonder what it is," said Louise, almost tearfully. "Oh, it seems as if he must surely know. There's no mistaking *that!*"

Maud poured some cologne on her handkerchief, and rubbed it briskly over her sister's fingers. "You look as frightened as Blue Beard's wife when she dropped the key in the bloody closet."

All through her dressing, Louise kept sniffing suspiciously at her dainty fingers, and even when she was ready to go downstairs, stopped at the door to look back, like a second Lady Macbeth.

"'Not all the odors of Araby can sweeten that little hand,'" she said in a tragic whisper, and Maud answered under her breath:

> "'You may break, you may shatter the vase if you will,
> The scent of the roses will cling 'round it still.'"

A little later, Mrs. Wiggan's French maid, going into the trunk room with an armful of clothes, began packing the bride's dainty trousseau. The trunks to be used for that purpose had been pointed out to her that afternoon.

As she opened the first one, such a penetrating odor greeted her that she drew back.

"Maybe ze camphor ball," she exclaimed aloud, lifting a corner of the box which nearly filled the bottom of the trunk. "Ah yes! she went on, peeping in. "It ees mademoiselle's furs, what air protect from ze bugs by zat killing odair. It will presairve also ze woollens as well." Forthwith she began deftly packing a pile of snowy flannels around the box which held the family disgrace.

Twenty-four hours later, that trunk among a number of others was jogging along in a baggage car on its way to New York. It was checked to the pier from which the *Majestic* was to sail that week, and tagged, "For the hold."

. . . . . .

It was the first parade that old Gid Wiggan had missed in twenty years, but it was not his niece's plotting which hept him at home. He lay with closed eyes in his dark little bedroom, too ill to know that a procession was passing. The old man had come to a place where he could no longer follow at the heels of a cheerful crowd. He must branch off by himself now, and find his solitary way as best he could, over a strangely lonesome road.

"He's an old miser, but it won't do to let him die like a heathen," said one of the neighbors, when his condition was discovered. So there were watchers by his bedside when the end came. Carriages had been rolling back and forth all the evening, and at last the ponderous rumbling aroused him.

"What's that?" he asked, opening his eyes as the sound of wheels reached him. "Is the parade coming?"

"Only the carriages driving back from St. Paul's," was the answer. "There's a wedding there to-night."

Old Gid closed his eyes again. "I remember now," he said. "It's Joe's little girl, but I didn't get a bid. They're ashamed of their old uncle. Well, they'll never be bothered with him any more now, nor any of his belongings."

The watchers exchanged glances and repeated the remark afterwards to the curious neighbors who came to look at the old man as he lay in his coffin. He had long had the reputation of being a miser, and more than one hand that day was passed searchingly over some piece of battered furniture. It was a common belief on that street that his fortune was stuffed away in some of the threadbare cushions.

His will, which came to light soon after, directed that the rickety old house should be sold to pay the expenses of his last illness and burial, and to erect a monument over him. As if not content with humiliating his family in the flesh, he had ordered that it be cut in stone: "Here lies the manufacturer and proprietor of Wiggan's Wild-cat Liniment." The old horse, after taking the part of chief mourner at his funeral, was to be chloroformed.

Of kith and kindred there had been no mention until the last clause of the will, by which he left the meagre contents of his laboratory to a distant cousin in Arizona, whom he had never seen, but who bore the same name as himself, with the addition of a middle initial. This was the clause which turned Gentryville upside down:

"And I also give, devise and bequeath to the said Gideon J. Wiggan, my stuffed wild-cat, hoping that he will find in it the mascot that I have found."

The same letter which informed the Arizona cousin of his legacy told him that it had mysteriously disappeared. No money was found in the house, and the disappearance of the wild-cat strengthened the prevalent belief that old Gid had used it as a receptacle for his savings, and had hidden it with all a miser's craftiness.

A week later the Arizona cousin appeared, having come East to unearth the mystery and to meet the remaining members of the Wiggan family, who, he understood, were living in Gentryville. He was too late. Maud and her mother had closed the house immediately after the wedding, and started on a summer jaunt, presumably to Alaska. His letters and telegrams received no answer and he could not locate his relatives, despite his persistent efforts. The more he investigated, the more he became convinced that old Gid, alienated from his immediate family, had made him his heir on account of the name, and that a fair-sized fortune was stuffed away in the body of the missing wild-cat. A few leaves from a queerly kept old ledger confirmed this opinion. Most of them had been torn out, but judging from the ones he examined, the receipts from the liniment sales must have been far greater than people supposed.

He did not suspect his cousin Joseph's family being a party to

the disappearance, until some servants' gossip reached him. The cook gave him his first clue, when a dollar jogged her memory. She remembered having seen the young ladies slipping up the back stairs the night before the wedding, carrying something between them. The laundress had asked her the next day where the young ladies could have been to get their dresses so soiled in the evening. They were streaked with coal-soot and smelled strongly of the liniment that their uncle made. The French maid, who had not gone with her mistress, but had taken a temporary position with a dressmaker, recognized the odor when a bottle was brought to her. She swore that it was the same that mademoiselle's furs were filled with. She had smelled it first when she packed them in the trunk.

The evidence of the cook, the laundress and the maid was enough for Gideon J. Wiggan. He was a loud, rough man, without education, but so uniformly successful in all his business enterprises that he had come to have an unbounded conceit, and an unlimited faith in himself. "I never yet bit off any more than I could chew," he was fond of saying. "I'm a self-made man. I've never failed in anything yet. I'm my own lawyer and my own doctor, and now I'll be my own detective; and I'll worm this thing out, if I have to go to Europe to do it."

To Europe he finally went. The happy bridal couple, making a tour of the cathedral towns of England, little dreamed what an avenging Nemesis was following fast in the wake of their honeymoon. From Canterbury to York he followed them, from York to Chester. They had always just gone. Evidently they were trying to elude him. Once he almost had his hand upon them. It was in London. He had reached the Hotel Metropole only two hours after their departure. They had gone ostensibly to Paris, but had left no address. He ground his teeth when he discovered that fact. How was he to trace them further without the slightest clue and without the faintest knowledge of any foreign tongue? For the first time in his life he had to acknowledge himself baffled.

The next day, while he was making cautious inquiries at Scotland Yard, preparatory to engaging a first-class detective, he fell in with an old acquaintance, a man whom he had known in Ari-

zona, and who was employed in the detective service himself. He had been sent over on the trail of some counterfeiters, and seemed to have an inexhaustible fund of information about every wealthy American who had gone abroad that summer. Within half an hour the baffled Gideon had put his case into his hands, humbly acknowledging that for once in his life he had bitten off more than he could chew.

. . . . . .

Dinner was in progress in one of the most fashionable hotels of Paris. Edward Van Harlem, seated opposite his wife at one of the many little tables, looked around approvingly. His fastidious eyes saw nothing to criticise in the whole luxurious apartment, except perhaps the too cheerful expression of the man who served them. A more sphinx-like cast of countenance would have betokened better training. Then he looked critically at his wife. It may be that the elegant New Yorker was a trifle over particular, but he could find no fault here. She was the handsomest woman in the room. She was dressed for the opera, and the priceless Van Harlem pearls around her white throat were worthy of a duchess. She wore them with the air of one, too, he noticed admiringly. He had not realized that a little Western girl could be so regal. Ah! if his mother could only see her now!

"What is it, Louise?" he asked, seeing her give a slight start of surprise. "Those two men at the table behind you," she answered, almost in a whisper, for the service was so noiseless and the general conversation so subdued that she was afraid of being overheard. "They look so common and out of place in their rough travelling suits. They are the only persons in the room not in evening dress."

Van Harlem turned slightly and gave a supercilious glance behind him. "How did such plebeians ever get in here?" he said, frowning slightly. "I wish America would keep such specimens home. It's queer they should stumble into an exclusive place like this. I should think they would feel like fish out of water."

Louise tasted her soup, and then looked up again. One of the men was watching her like a hawk. His persistent gaze annoyed her, but there was a compelling force about it that made her steal another glance at him. His eyes held hers an instant in startled

fascination, then she dropped them with a sudden fear that made her cold and faint. The man bore a remarkable likeness to her Uncle Gideon. More than that, she had discovered some resemblance to her father in the determined chin and the way his hair rolled back from his forehead. That little droop of the lip was like her father's, too. Could it be that there was some remote tie between them and that the stranger was staring at her because he, too, saw a family likeness? She was afraid for her husband to turn around lest he should discover it also.

Ever since the arrival of the mails that morning, she had been in a state of nervous apprehension. Somebody had sent her a marked copy of the *Gentryville Times*, with an account of her uncle's will and the heir's vain search for his legacy. She had wanted to write immediately to Maud, and ask if she had remembered, in the confusion that followed the wedding, to restore the old man's property, but Edward had carried her away for a day's sight-seeing, and she had had no opportunity.

As she sat idly toying with her dinner, some intuition connected this man with her Uncle Gideon, and she was in a fever of impatience to get away, for fear he might obtrude himself on her husband's notice. When they had first swept into the dining-room, the Arizona cousin had leaned over the table until his face almost touched the detective's. "They're stunners! Ain't they?" he whispered. "Wonder if any of my money bought them pearls and gew-gaws. Well, this show's worth the box-seat prices we paid to get next to 'em. I wonder if the waiter would have promised to put us alongside if I'd offered him any less than a five-franc piece." Then, as Louise's eyes fell before his in embarrassment, he muttered, "She looks guilty, doesn't she! I'll bet my hat she suspicions what we're after."

The two men were only beginning their salad course, when Van Harlem beckoned a waiter and gave an order in French. "What did he say?" asked Wiggan, suspiciously. "I wish I could make out their beastly lingo."

"He sent to call a carriage, and to tell the maid to bring the lady's wraps. They're going to the opera."

"You mean they're going to give us the slip again! Come on! We must stop 'em!"

"Now, Gid, you just cool down," advised the detective, calmly. "I'm working this little game. It's a family affair and there's no use making a row in public. There's plenty of time." But his client had no ear for caution. The Van Harlems had risen, and were going slowly down the long drawing-room. All eyes followed the beautiful American girl and the aristocratic young fellow who carried himself like a lord. The mirror-lined walls flashed black the pleasing reflection from every side, and then replaced it with a most astonishing sight.

In and out between the little tables with their glitter of cut-glass and silver, dashed a common-looking fellow in a coarse plaid suit. Upsetting chairs, whisking table-cloths from their places, bumping into solemn waiters with their laden trays, he seemed oblivious to everything but the escaping couple. The detective had detained him as long as possible, and the couple had almost reached the door when he started in frantic pursuit. He reached them just as they stepped into the corridor. He tried to curb his trembling voice, but in his excitement it rang out to the farthest corner of the great apartment, high above the music of the violins, playing softly in a curtained alcove.

"You want your *what?*" demanded the elegant Van Harlem in a tone that would have frozen a less desperate man.

"I want that stuffed wild-cat," he roared, "that your wife's uncle left me in his will, and you made off with. I came all the way from America for it, and I'll have it now, or you'll go to jail, sure as my name is Gideon J. Wiggan."

Louise, already unnerved by her fears at dinner, and exhausted by the tiresome day of sight-seeing, started forward, deathly pale. It seemed to her that the man had shouted out her name so that all Paris must have heard. The disgrace had followed her even over seas.

She looked up piteously at her husband, and then fell fainting in his arms.

"The man's crazy," exclaimed Van Harlem, as he strode with her toward the elevator. "Here, waiter, call the police and have that lunatic put out of the house. He's dangerous."

It was only a moment until he had reached their rooms and had laid Louise gently on a couch, but as he turned to ring for the

maid, the two men confronted him on the threshold. The detective bolted the door, and the Arizona cousin took out his revolver.

"No, you don't ring that bell," he exclaimed, seeing Van Harlem move in the direction of the button; "nor you don't get out of here until you hand over that wild-cat. You've got it and your wife knows it. That's why she fainted. My friend here is a detective, and we're going through your things till we find it, for it's full of gold."

Van Harlem moved forward to wrest away the revolver, but the detective presented his. "No, you can't do that either," he said, quietly. "I'm going to see that my friend gets his rights."

With the helpless feeling that he was in the hands of two madmen, Van Harlem stood by while trunk after trunk was overhauled, and the trousseau scattered all over the room. The one containing the flannels had not been unlocked since it left Gentryville. It was the last to be examined.

Louise opened her eyes with a little shriek as a familiar odor penetrated to her consciousness. They had unearthed the family skeleton. "*Louise!*" cried her husband as the old moth-eaten animal was dragged from under her dainty lingerie. "What under *heaven* does this mean?" Another fainting spell was her only answer, and the one yellow glass eye leered up at him, as if defying the whole Van Harlem pedigree.

A minute later a stream of saw-dust oozed out from the beast's body, covering the piles of be-ribboned lace and linen, scattered all over the velvet carpet. Then a limp, shapeless skin with its one yellow eye still glaring, was kicked across the room. The Arizona cousin had no further use for it. He had come into his inheritance.

He walked across the room and gave the moth-eaten skin another kick. Then, with an oath, he handed his friend a slip of paper which he had found inside. Written across it in faded purple ink were three straggling lines. It was the formula for making the famous "Wiggan's Wild-cat Liniment."

A Million-Dollar Cinder.*

BY WILL N. HARBEN.

ANY curious things besides securities, gold, silver and jewels are jealously guarded by the fire and burglar proof safe-deposit companies. One expensive compartment of a well-known New York company holds only a few faded letters, another a lock of hair and a third a baby's ragged shoes.

But the strangest of them all, the most unique object ever entrusted to an institution for safe keeping, is a certain bottled cinder stored in the vaults of The International Security Company. Thousands of dollars have been expended in fruitless attempts to read the baffling secret contained in that glass cylinder and hundreds of thousands more would be paid cheerfully to any one able to bring it to light. Four men have gone gray from anxiety to acquire the knowledge it conceals and become nervous wrecks from the bitterness of hope deferred.

This is its history:

Late one afternoon in May, 1896, as Hubert Lancaster was about to leave his private office in Wall Street, word was brought to him that a person giving the name of Micah Redwood insisted on an interview. The name seemed to make an impression upon the busy stock operator, and much to the office boy's surprise, he was told to show in the shabby old man, who had been for half an hour the unconscious butt of the outer office. It was a man whom Lancaster remembered as a friend of his father. He beheld him now, apparently in the grasp of a fatal illness, his eyes ablaze with mania or enthusiasm and his speech wild, though coherent. For half an hour the broker listened to an incredible story — the old story — of the transmutation of base metals into gold. Redwood professed to desire no money, but only to enrich the young man in restitution of advances made by his father, and Lancaster, in

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skeptical pity, promised to bring three business friends to investigate Redwood's process on the following night.

The party included a metallurgist and a millionaire, and in a dim attic far up town — half laboratory, half kitchen — the incongruous company assembled. In unbelief they watched the old man's strange manipulations, with surprise they saw gold produced in their presence and then with amazement beheld the experiment successfully repeated with material of their own. The demonstration lasted into the small hours of the morning.

"I am a convert," exclaimed the millionaire, at last. "You may draw on me, Lancaster, for any reasonable amount. But if this thing should get out — my God! What would become of the finances of the world?"

"Thank you, gentlemen," said the old alchemist calmly, while nervous exaltation showed in every move. "Here on this paper," and he rolled a stiff sheet tightly between his fingers, "is the formula by which any of you can produce the regal metal. Capital is all that is needed to make us all fabulously rich. I — I — "

An expression of acute pain crossed his face, he gasped, staggered, clutched at the crucible over which he had been at work and fell, the paper slipping from his fingers into the red-hot glow.

"Save it!" he gasped.

With hands stretched impotently toward the furnace he fell backward, dead. There was a yellow flash on the ceiling. The formula was a cinder.

Tongue-tied by sudden despair, four men stood over the lifeless body and looked from it to the red grave of their hopes. It was three o'clock in the morning. The city was as still as a tomb. Lancaster alone offered to remain with the body till the medical officer whom the others agreed to notify should come.

Alone, he sat brooding, stunned by the sudden touch of Fortune's hand, so quickly withdrawn to deal a crushing blow. As the first pencils of daylight stole in at the windows he rose to inspect the room, hoping his vigil would be brief. The crucible, now dark and grim, caught his attention and he peered regretfully into it.

There to his surprise he saw, absolutely intact as to shape, a black roll constituting the remains of the lost formula. But so light was the cinder that his breath, filling its tiny orifice, caused

it to float out into the room. There it was caught by a current from a window crack and borne up toward the ceiling, where, in the rising heat of the gas, it remained poised for a moment like a bubble and then lightly descended and settled upon a steel plate on the table beside the lump of gold made by the alchemist.

Slowly and cautiously, lest his movements set the thing afloat again, Lancaster bent over the cinder, on which he had caught a glimpse of something that made his heart jump. For there, in the interior of the cylinder, traced in a vitreous bluish-white against the dead black surface, he saw parts of the letters of a word! It was plain that the writing was all there, but folded from sight within the roll.

The formula existed, if its charred remains could be unrolled and forced to disclose the priceless secret! With fingers steadied by some unnamed force within, where all else was tumult, he touched an extreme corner of the cinder, to see it crumble to the finest powder. Hastily he drew back. So fragile was the roll that the slightest puff, the opening of a door, might cause it to fall to pieces.

The emergency restored to the business man his normal coolness. Searching the room with his eyes, he descried a wide-mouthed glass vessel, which he cautiously inverted over the cinder and the gold on the plate of steel.

Enabled to breathe more freely, his mind worked rapidly. It was nearly daylight now. Coroner, policeman — all sorts of meddlers would soon be there. The precious cinder must be hidden, for to be seen taking anything from the premises would invite suspicion and disaster.

Pacing the floor, it yielded to his tread. He pulled back a corner of the rug, found two loose boards, and beneath them a hiding place large enough for the cinder and its cover. The racking nerve-strain involved in transferring them to their place of concealment would have aged and shaken an even younger and steadier man.

The inquest and subsequent formalities relieved Lancaster and his friends from any unpleasant complications, and the finding of a will bequeathing Redwood's effects to Lancaster made easy and natural his assumption of the unexpired tenancy.

Then, cautiously and methodically, the four men with whom Fortune had so grimly jested went to work. Not a step was taken without deliberation, earnest counsel and unanimous consent. First Redwood's papers were searched, but no duplicate formula nor any memoranda indicating its nature were found. Then his writing materials were examined. Paper similar to that of the unburned scroll as the searchers remembered it was there, and with that and a bottle of ink in the desk tests were made. Written sheets, rolled as nearly like the original formula as possible, were subjected to the heat of the crucible, in the hope of producing a cinder with which experiments might be made without risking the demolition of the prototype.

After many disheartening failures, the preliminaries to this test were accomplished, but then the experimenters found themselves as far as ever from success, for at the slightest touch the cinders turned to dust. Photography was tried. The sharpest obtainable negatives were made, and both they and enlarged prints were scrutinized under magnifiers, but no further traces of writing could be perceived.

The regular occupations of the four associates were neglected — they thought of nothing but the cinder and its secret. No possible avenue to success in their strange endeavor was neglected. One of their first thoughts had been to consult those who might possess special knowledge of the required kind. Safe manufacturers, insurance adjusters, and others having to deal with the charred remains of valuable papers were sought, and Washington was visited for a conference with a government expert successful in restoring, sufficiently for redemption purposes, burnt notes and bonds. Assurances were received that it was quite possible to unroll and decipher a burnt scroll, and hope revived. With cheerful zeal Lancaster and his friends resumed their experiments, confident that success was merely a matter of time and patience.

One February evening the metallurgist burst in upon his partners, his face aglow with hope, bringing a newspaper a month old, containing the announcement of Röntgen's now famous discovery. With joyful expectation, mingled with a touch of awe, they read the then marvellous statement. What words could describe more

accurately the need they felt of a piercing ray that should penetrate the very heart of their tantalizing mystery, and reveal to them its secret without the exercise of a milligramme of physical force?

Intense energy, lavish expenditure and unremitting toil resulted in less than two weeks in the most elaborate and complete X-ray apparatus in America, and what the investigators believed to be the crucial trial came.

Alas for their hopes! Money and effort had been wasted. The writing on the interior of the roll, with whatever pigment traced, whether merely superficial or so incorporated with the substance of the cinder as to present no structural difference, afforded no contrasting laminæ, and no skiagraph resulted.

Secret as every move and enquiry of those interested had been, yet news that they were studying some unusually difficult problem, involving, it was reported, enormous sums, got to circles tangent to their line of enquiry, and many suggestions and offers of aid were considered and entertained. At length, when the most strenuous efforts effected nothing, it was reluctantly determined to call in the services of an eminent European scientist, whose researches into the structure of matter were known to be most profound. Correspondence convinced the investigators that this man, if any one, could accomplish their desire. An honorarium in advance — a very large one — with travelling and incidental expenses guaranteed, brought the distinguished savant to their presence, on the promise of an enormous contingent fee should he succeed.

His apparatus came packed in a case scarce larger than a hand camera, but his calm air of confidence filled his patrons with assurance of success. He heard politely and approved the precautions taken, and when shown a duplicate cinder, produced after repeated failures, encouraged the associates by intimating that they had set him an easy task.

He laid out his simple equipment of bottles, pans and pliers, deftly treated the delicate roll of incinerated paper to successive baths of his solutions, and in fifteen minutes had it spread out before them, limp and clammy, looking very like a gelatine photographic film just out of the developer. Easily they read in faint white letters upon its wet black surface these words, which Lan-

caster, by an inspiration that now seemed prophetic, had chanced to write:

> Now if thou canst read the writing, and make known to me the interpretation thereof, thou shalt be clothed with scarlet, and have a chain of gold about thy neck.

Joyously the little group congratulated each other and the smiling foreigner, and hinted at greater reward than scarlet and gold. Then the precious cinder of the burned formula itself was carefully taken from its air-tight glass cylinder. For the use of those present an ingenious set of respiratory instruments had been prepared, so that no possible breath of air could fall upon the brittle thing in which all their hopes were centred. These pieces of apparatus had been adjusted, and the expert was opening the glass cylinder, when one of the group suddenly freed his mouth and called out, sharply:

"Hold on, Professor!"

His quick vision had caught a look in the eyes of the others to which his own tense feelings responded, and he only echoed what was in their minds when he added:

"Suppose — er — that is — before you begin, what security — what guarantee — can you give us, Professor, that the cinder will not be destroyed?"

The lips of the foreign savant curled crimson between the jet of his pointed moustaches and his still more pointed beard. He began to pack his bottles and pans into their case as he calmly answered, in his precise, bookish English:

"I believe, gentlemen, that you are all experts in your several lines. What guarantee do you give a client that the stocks you buy for him at a premium to-day will not be worthless to-morrow? What security do you offer that the ore vein which assays $800 to the ton this week will not next month pinch out, I think you call it — or is it peter out? I am an expert in my profession, like yourselves, and like you, I give no guarantees but my reputation. Gentlemen, I wish you a very good morning."

He was on his way to the door when called back with profuse apologies.

"Let him go ahead in his own way," muttered Lancaster. "This suspense is agony — let us have it over."

But again the cool caution of the shrewd man of millions pre-

vailed. It was stipulated and agreed that only the smallest practicable portion of the cinder should be used for a trial experiment.

Slowly, surely, with the nicest movements of the delicate white fingers, the expert treated a corner of the tight roll with two of his liquids, and then as skilfully cut it away. Dexterously he transferred it to a sheet of glass and examined it. He looked at the fragment of cinder through a magnifier. The four men watched every motion with the expression you may have seen on faces in a surgeon's ante-room. He touched his white finger-tip to the black morsel on the glass plate. It became a smutch. Very slowly and reluctantly, then, and with chagrin he turned to the anxious spectators:

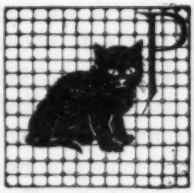
"Gentlemen, the experiment is a failure. The texture of this cinder cannot be restored by any known process. When it was produced there was present in the heat of that crucible some element in nature of which science is ignorant."

. . . . . .

There are four men who feel quite certain that the name — or rather the nature — of that unknown element is inscribed on the crisp carbon of that cinder which, returned to its hermetically sealed cylinder, reposes in the safety-deposit vaults. They will give a large share of their still ample means to the one who shall succeed in unrolling it and placing in their hands the hidden key to the wealth of all the world.

The Luck of William the Angel.*

BY PAUL SHOUP.



"PICTURESQUE alibis comes natural to the mountains," Uncle George was wont to say, and perhaps it was for no better reason than this that the newcomer was known as William the Angel; or maybe it was the reason subscribed to by William himself — the rest of us were so strikingly unlike angels. I suppose the boys would laugh at me for putting the idea into words, but I think it was because of his pale face with no lines in it, and his hands, slender like a girl's. Then there was that unseeing look in his eyes that hid some intense picture in his mind; he might be gazing at a ridge and seeing something far beyond on the other side. Also, I remember that when the sunshine was on his face, his countenance was very pleasant to look upon.

We had heard the wind blowing through the tree tops for a long time; but it was left to William to discover that way up in the darkness, while we were gathered about the camp fire, the pine tops were singing, singing nature songs that only spirits of the mountains could understand. A good many of us had discovered there was a sunrise by remaining up over night, and the teamsters who made a three o'clock start in the morning for the valley were quite familiar with it, but William actually arose before daybreak and climbed the ridge to see the sun come up over Old Baldy, and listen to the squirrels and mountain quail hello at each other. We could not help having fun with such a chap as that; and after a quiet fashion he had a good deal of fun with us, though sometimes after meeting him we had to go below like a harpooned whale and meditate awhile before we knew what had struck us. I do not know why he came to Cloud's Rest; he seemed strong enough, and it was a poor place in which to repair

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one's fortunes. So far as the last was concerned, titles to castles in Spain were about all he had to show, and in that property he accepted all the partners of the understanding who came along, without price. Old Dame Rumor could do no more for us by way of his biography than to contradict herself, which was done whenever Major Cole and Uncle George Webster met.

Uncle George had a mine, which seemed a pity, for it was no such treasure as his daughter, Rosalind. But he was daft about the mine and went on working, he and Rosalind living on the kindness of the storekeeper and great expectations, for Rosalind believed in her father and his faith was for the most part her faith. When Uncle George's wife died, he was as a man who has lost the Great Trail, for awhile; but there was a guiding star that kept him from stumbling overmuch; to this baby the mother bequeathed her few trinkets and her name, Rosalind.

I am not over-sentimental — I pay my board bill and get my money's worth at the cook-house, I reckon — but I cannot help remembering what William said about hunting through hot-houses, and then tramping off to some cañon, and finding a bluebell nodding at him from the shadow of some boulder: "God made this without interference." Rosalind gained a store of experience from Uncle George, and she had an air of cheerful sense about her that was refreshing. The camp felt the shadow of her departure when she went away to the boarding-school, where school ma'ams who carried their elbows in and their chins tilted, pointed out to her some things in books; and more she found out for herself. But the mountains, of course, gave her the greater part of her education; for the artists the Sierra Nevadas have their shadows and their gleamings; as William pointed out, the very tree tops are teachers of music; and as for libraries in the way of running brooks and the preachments in boulders, there is no end. And I guess, too, that if any one could, Rosalind found good in everything. William said there was something in her smile alone that made Cloud's Rest the richest mining camp in the Sierras, from which may be judged the state of William's feelings at the time Redsom Fisher arrived in camp.

Redsom had not been with us more than one night when it was apparent that his proper measure could be taken only with a wind

gauge with a capacity of a hundred miles an hour, straight-away blow. He was a big chap, handsome after an evil fashion, and decidedly fresh from 'way down East somewhere. Redsom was a wood-chopper, not a miner, and had been hired by the saw-mill foreman; at the cook-house he told such tales of the axe that William placidly hinted that he knew of a tree that Redsom could not cut down in two weeks with an audience hired to applaud every chip. Redsom demanded details, and the next Sunday William piloted him down Calaveras way to a giant sequoia, ninety feet in circumference, which silenced even Redsom Fisher for thirty minutes. He recovered shortly — but the tree is still standing. The men were not friendly after that, and when Rosalind came between them, war was declared without the formality of ultimatums.

After meeting Rosalind, Redsom was quite impressed with the future of Lookout Mine, and often called on Uncle George merely to express his confidence in that hole in the earth. Of course he found favor at once with Rosalind's father, who grew poorer and more enthusiastic every day; for while he was running imaginary quartz through an imaginary mill with imaginary gold bars as a result, the wolf came and sat on the doorstep and looked longingly inside. So when Redsom insisted on backing his confidence with a loan, gratitude glistened in Uncle George's eyes.

None of us then thoroughly appreciated Uncle George's confidence in the Lookout, nor how desperate were his affairs. That he was encouraging Redsom's attentions to Rosalind, we could not think possible; for we could not see either the situation or Redsom from Uncle George's point of view. I can see now that we blocked his trail with a good deal of uncalled for abuse. It was observed that Uncle George had quit smiling, and was thin and haggard, but it was supposed to be on account of his mine; it was not known for some time after how deeply he was in the toils. I suppose, though, that bargaining Rosalind to Redsom for the sake of help in his project did not appear to him as it would have been seen by others; Redsom seemed the best friend he had then, I can now see, and doubtless was considered as a good possible son-in-law. But I guess that if the wolf had known of that, he would have slipped off into the woods; any self-respecting

wolf would have been ashamed to be caught longer on that doorstep.

A bargain may be made secretly with the devil, but the world acquires information concerning the transaction in a surprisingly easy fashion. It is evident that the devil is not to be trusted. So along late in autumn we heard that Redsom, in return for his assistance, was to have a half-interest in the mine and a whole interest in Rosalind. That Rosalind approved of the plan, none of us for a moment believed; that she would sacrifice herself to save her father, for I verily believe it was a question of sanity as well as of wealth for him, none of us could doubt. Uncle George eased his conscience with the provision that if they struck it rich before Christmas, in addition to the half-interest in the mine, Redsom was to be repaid all the money he had advanced, and Rosalind was to go East and take her time about marrying, should she decide to marry Redsom at all. So carefully had she concealed her feelings from her father, that to him the marriage was not as momentous a question as wealth. He doubtless reasoned it out very logically in his mind; he could by dint of economy hold out until Christmas; if he found fortune before them, Rosalind should do exactly as she pleased; if ill-luck attended, she would be provided with a comfortable home by a Christmas Day marriage. But he had no doubt that the Lookout would pan out by that time.

All this came to us as rumor, and largely was not believed. If we had known it all — but there, Cloud's Rest and a rope were once the department of justice between dark and dawn, without ceremony, and that once was enough.

Nothing went right with Lookout Mine. If Uncle George attempted to blast, the charge would lack force; if he drilled or swung a pick, the mine would exhibit a strong tendency to cave. Every day Redsom became more insolent and assertive; he would fix his evil eyes upon the girl as if she were his property. It was well that William did not see that.

Rosalind smiled very infrequently then, and grew white and serious; her skies must have been dully colored indeed. As for William the Angel, he lay awake of nights and thought desperately of plans to trade his air castles for something more useful and tangible, for intuitively he knew what was coming.

A few days before Christmas, I noticed that Redsom seemed a bit uneasy. He even laid off to make several trips into the Look-out. Uncle George brightened a little about that time — some trace of gold was appearing in the samples of quartz he brought up.

After Time has merged all other days in Cloud's Rest into one streak of history, there is one that will stand out individually, like a flash of chain lightning against a background of cloud. It is the day before Christmas of that year. Until then, Rosalind had borne bravely up; I do not think she had held unwavering faith in the mine, but I suppose she had in Providence, which was better. The day was black; clouds solidly overarched the sky; the pine trees were like forlorn ghosts; it was indeed gloomy enough to make a red flannel shirt appear dismal.

When I met Rosalind coming down the trail, the last trace of cheerfulness had left her face. Somehow, with lip quivering, she seemed so lonesome and forlorn that, hard-headed and old as I am, something stirred me deeply; I suppose it was the feeling that woke up the chaps you read of called knights-errant. I wished her to point out something for me to fight in her behalf, but there was a dignity and reserve about the young lady that made me hesitate; and while I stood tongue-tied, she went down the trail. Yet would I have liked mightily her permission to go down to the mill and reach for the collar of Redsom Fisher and, in language worse than downright ugly, invite him to come out on the hillside and fight with all the fight that was in him; some one would have been thoroughly thrashed that day. Of course, I knew that would not do. I am worse priest than prophet, and worse judge than priest, in this bow-and-arrow warfare of Cupid against the universe; but I am not so stupid as not to know that an awkward man armed with nothing better than good intentions should not interfere in a matter of this kind until the lady in the case has her feet wet in the deep sea.

Never had Uncle George been in such a fever of anxiety as on that day. One moment he would be eager with hope, and his voice would break out tremulously above the noise of the crowd down at the Red Flag; the next his face would be buried in his hands. About three o'clock, all being ready, he went down into

the Lookout to fire the last blast; the charge that was to make him and Rosalind free, or wreck his hopes and Rosalind and himself together. I think his bargain with the devil was coming home to him then in its full significance.

The day was fading into night when Uncle George left the safe-burning fuse and made his way to the entrance of the mine.

For a moment thereafter the spark glowed brightly in the darkness; then a shadow crossed the beam. The flash of a bull's-eye lantern spread its eddying light upon the wall, and Redsom stood over the burning tape. The secret of ineffective blasts was explained at last; some at least had been tampered with, even after placing. He reached out his hand and stooped.

"Stop!" said a clear voice out of the darkness.

Redsom, startled and angry, swept the tunnel with his lantern.

Rosalind stood in the middle of the way, her eyes sparkling. Her cheeks were red enough then too, I wager, for there was the spirit of fighting forefathers in that girl. Her lip was curved scornfully.

"You coward!" she said, and there was a landslide of contempt in her voice. "You are too villanous to rob a man in the open air; you must come underground to steal his wealth and honor —" she had begun boldly enough, but her voice died away in a sob; it came home to her all at once, I suppose, that she was but a girl facing a scoundrel alone.

An evil smile was on Redsom's face. The tape burned slowly at his feet. He stepped to one side and, leaping quickly forward, was between the entrance and Rosalind.

"It is bad policy, my love," he said, "to interfere in the business dealings of your father with the man who is to claim you as wife to-morrow. I did not suppose you would spy upon your lover. Perhaps I am wrong," he added sneeringly, with a look that made the girl shrink. "Maybe you have more interest in me than I supposed. So we will reach an agreement to-night to marry to-morrow surely, and we will seal the bargain with a kiss."

He sprang forward and caught the shrinking girl in his arms, when another voice spoke in the darkness and there was the noise of a swiftly moving step. Redsom turned and picked up the lantern he had dropped.

William the Angel walked out easily in the dim light; no one ever knew him to become excited. He turned an immobile face toward Redsom, a face whereon every vein stood out like whip-cord.

"My horse is at the mouth of the tunnel," he said. "Merely to save trouble for Miss Webster, you are at liberty to leave within the next three minutes; you may reach Jackson by to-morrow and leave him at the stable."

Redsom laughed a little to himself as one who is intensely pleased.

"And if I don't choose?" he said.

William moved nearer Rosalind. The fuse was burning quietly.

"You will settle with me now," he said, simply. "If you survive, I wish the world the good luck to see you hung at daybreak. Rosalind, you had best go."

With an inarticulate growl, Redsom threw himself at his opponent. An excited man or one slow of eye or laggard in action would have been caught unprepared. It was not so with the Angel. In quarrel, as in kindness, he met others more than half way. Slender and lacking in bulk, there was no waste in his body; it was a machine, trained, effective, skilful in its work. Then, over in the semi-darkness against the wall, clung a girl for whom he would have smilingly fought all the powers of evil. For Rosalind did not stir.

Backward and forward in the narrow tunnel they fought, twisting, heaving, straining, now upright, now down on their knees. It was skill against blind fury — science against brute strength. They fought in silence — one for greed and lust and power, the other for justice, honor and love. The burning fuse hissed away in the darkness unheeded. With fixed, wide-open eyes, Rosalind watched the battle.

William summoned to his aid all the energies of his mind and body for a last effort; triumphs of the old football days came back to him, and he heard again the old familiar "Rah, 'rah, 'rah!" Then came up before him the face of a girl, and his body became as of steel. With one mighty effort he lifted the giant bulk of his enemy and threw him desperately. Redsom struck a supporting timber, and, whether it was because the timbering of the mine

was poor, or from the natural tendency of the hanging wall to cave, I do not know; but in another minute both men were lost in a confusion of falling dirt and rock.

The dust settled after a little, and half-choked, William worked himself free from the débris. By the light of the lantern on the floor he could see the transformation the interior of the tunnel had undergone. Great masses of slate and gravel had fallen. The tunnel seemed completely blocked, but he was on the side of the blockade next to the entrance. Where was Rosalind? He glanced hurriedly about and then examined the fallen rock. Between two masses of slate he managed to effect an opening, where, by lying at full length, he could see through.

At the one wall, half-buried, was the unconscious Redsom. William swept the lantern rays across the floor. At the opposite side lay Rosalind, buried from her waist down with a heavy weight of gravel. A half sigh showed returning consciousness. William lifted his eyes reluctantly from her face.

A thrill of horror ran through him; then for a moment he prayed with all the strength of his soul for help.

A brilliant spark was glowing in the darkness beyond. Two-thirds of the fuse was burned away; in a few minutes more —

Then his old energy came back to him. He set systematically to work. It was a struggle against time. He labored heroically pulling down huge masses of slate, tearing at the gravel; danger from falling rock was accepted unheeded; one idea possessed his soul and directed his body. Perspiration drenched his clothing, his hands were torn and bleeding; he did not know it. It was the fight of courage against Fate, of unyielding hope against the inevitable. More slate fell; he attacked it grimly. Defeat laughed sardonically in his face — he refused to recognize it.

William was almost through the barricade; the fuse largely but a blackened trail. Two immense boulders, immovable, blocked the way. He was working with the strength of a giant; but these were not playthings for giants. His physical being recognized that he was conquered — his soul would not admit defeat.

Between the boulders he forced himself a little way and reached through an arm. Further progress was not possible. By an effort he touched Rosalind's hand.

"Rosalind," he whispered.

She stirred and raised herself slightly. Perplexity was in her eyes. Then she turned her head a little way and at a glance saw the unconscious Redsom, the burning fuse, the barrier of rock and gravel, and, framed in the crevice between boulders, the pallid face of William the Angel. She could feel the touch of his finger tips —and understood.

If there was terror in her eyes for a moment, in that dim light William could not see it.

"Save yourself," she said softly. "You cannot help."

"Do you love me?" he asked simply.

The color came to her face and a light to her eyes. "Yes," she whispered. "For my sake, go."

Then out spoke the soul of William the Angel.

"I love you, and you are dearer to me than life. Not death shall part us, or anything."

Rosalind's lips moved in prayer; her face was radiant.

. . . . . .

Uncle George sat at the mouth of the tunnel on a cracker box and waited, whittling a pine splinter into tooth-picks. He explained with much detail the character of the charge that was to blast him a fortune; how unusually powerful it was, with what care it had been placed, and even how he had given it an unusual length of fuse to be in keeping. To all this the crowd listened with interest, though it did not share in his enthusiasm.

The conversation ceased suddenly. Where it came from, up the cañon, over the hill, out of the earth or from the clear sky, none could say, but a peculiar roar was every moment growing louder.

Uncle George's cracker box began to gyrate beneath him. Boulders lifted themselves ponderously and turned over. Upon the ridge the pine trees bowed to one another ceremoniously. For a minute, perhaps, the water in the creek literally ran up hill. Cabins yawned wearily and one or two collapsed, as if from sheer fatigue. Men staggered about, reaching for support and clasping the air.

In a minute's time or less, the great earthquake had stamped its ineffaceable seal upon Cloud's Rest, and was gone. Men steadied themselves; the cabins were again stolid; the water returned to

its course and the pine trees resumed their upright formality. Uncle George's cracker box ceased to gyrate.

Then Uncle George remembered his mine. He waited awhile; there was no report. Accompanied by some venturesome spirits, he went down into the darkness of the tunnel.

A mass of slate, loosened by the earthquake shock, had fallen upon the fuse and extinguished it. The barricade had been half-leveled. They found Rosalind and William, half-buried and unconscious, with fingers yet clasped. But it was three days before the body of Redsom Fisher was recovered.

Out on the slope, William was endeavoring to sit up, somewhat dazed and bruised, but not greatly the worse for his experience. Uncle George was bending over Rosalind in a very ecstasy of anxiety and tenderness.

Major Cole came up behind them, and his voice rang out right heartily.

"The earthquake's fixed it for you, Uncle George! There's a vein of free-milling ore uncovered down there with a yellow hundred thousand in plain view."

Uncle George raised a rugged face, glowing, but from another cause.

"Thank you," he said. "I'm much obliged, but it don't really matter so much, fer Rosy, thanks be ter God, is comin' to."

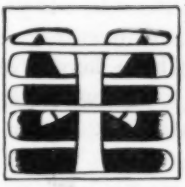
William heard and raised himself painfully and turned toward Rosalind. Her opening eyes saw first her father's face and then her lover's.

"Father," she whispered, and then with an unconcealed gleam of love in her eyes, "William —"

— "*Her* angel," interjected Major Cole!

The Warden's Overcoat.*

BY GRACE GORRILL GOWING.



THE man in stripes clipped steadily at the warden's rose hedge. The shears worked with a rhythm while he counted under his breath: "One, two, three, four, five," then a pause, and on again from one to ten, followed by a longer pause. So No. 19 counted when he did not want to think. Five years had passed since the prison doors closed on him — ten more must drag themselves along before he might take off the stripes and let his hair grow.

He looked up at the warden's house, crowning green terraces, then down at the blue bay, stretching away to join the ocean. He could dimly discern the land where the city lay. In fancy he walked the familiar streets, watched the crowds passing and repassing, climbed the stairs to his old lodging place and looked down on the smoky, dingy square, not so fresh and green as this garden, but there were no stripes to be seen in it — men came and went as they pleased.

Once more the rhythmic clip, clip went on. It was well enough for the men under lock and key to think, but for a trusty, with the free world about him, and the sky above him, counting was better than thinking.

The prison bell tolled six o'clock. No. 19 gathered together his gardening tools and went down the terrace steps toward the office. The warden paused in the office doorway, watching the man coming towards him. He liked No. 19. The hard side of life that his position compelled him to feel had not taken the kindness and sympathy from his nature.

"You're doing well with the garden," he said. "To-morrow you may trim the rose over the porch. Cut it back from the upper window. It takes too much sun from my room."

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The trusty touched his hat and passed on.

The warden started up the first terrace toward his home. Above all his worries there was the pleasant consciousness that there were some men about him upon whom he might rely. No. 19 was a trustworthy man. A touch on his arm startled him. No. 19 was beside him. For a few seconds the two men regarded each other silently.

"Well?" queried the warden.

No. 19 steadied his voice with an effort. "I've been here five years," he said. "For the last year I've been a trusty, working about the garden as if I were free, but for God's sake, lock me up again!"

The warden stared blankly at him. "Lock you up again?" he repeated. "What's the trouble now?"

No. 19 looked past him and off over the bay. He could see the twinkling lights of the city through the autumn twilight.

"Only this," he answered. "I'm not to be trusted out here where I can look over yonder," with a vague gesture in the direction of the lights, "and I want to be locked up again. I tell you, if you've a drop of human kindness in you, you'll shut me up, away from all this," he added, fiercely.

The warden looked at him kindly. "You've been thinking too much," he answered. "Cheer up, and put those ideas out of your head. There's been more than one sentence shortened by good behavior, you know," he added, encouragingly, as he turned and went up the steps, while No. 19 went down, and on through the great iron gate, which shut heavily after him.

"Twelve o'clock, and all's well!" starting faintly in the distance, ringing clear as the guard near the convict's cell took it up, dying away to an echo as it reached the farthest wall, round No. 19. He smiled grimly as he heard it. "All's well so far," he muttered, "but if they don't lock me up — "

The next afternoon No. 19 trimmed the rose over the porch of the warden's house. There was no counting now, only thinking. He climbed the ladder, step by step, as he worked. It was nearing time for the lock-up. At a quarter before six he stepped from the top of the ladder to the railing above. He looked through the open window into the warden's room, at the comfortable bed, the

bureau with its brushes and boxes, the easy chairs, and through the half open door of the closet, in which he caught a glimpse of the warden's clothes, suits without a stripe on them.

For five minutes the clipping went steadily on. There was no one upstairs, no one within sight in the garden. The warden and his family had gone to the city, and they would not return before seven o'clock. The twilight had already begun its work of softening the edges of everything; in half an hour it would mix all into an indistinguishable mass.

No. 19 paused a moment before he stepped over the window sill. The city lights seemed to twinkle encouragingly at him.

The six o'clock bell tolled as he climbed over the sill. He stopped at the sound of the familiar prison voice. He stood straight and still in the window, looking at the dark walls and buildings far below him. "Come," the bell called, deep and resistless. He raised his head and looked up and out. All the free things in the earth about him seemed to call him silently. As the last note of the bell died warningly away, he leaned far out of the open window. "I am coming," he said. He had answered the silent voices.

He turned and crossed the room to the door leading into the hallway, and locked it. He slipped his coat off as he went to the closet door, and entering, took the suit hanging farthest from the door, and a dark hat and overcoat. Then he undressed and dressed again quickly.

When he was ready he rolled his own striped suit into a bundle. They must be hidden, but where? He looked quickly about him. As he lifted his arm to place them on the closet shelf, a bell clanged out from the prison. He was reported missing, and the man-hunt had begun. While he thrust his clothes back on the shelf he heard hoarse shouts below. They were searching the garden. He stole to the locked door, turned the key and half-opened the door. That might disarm suspicion if they searched the house. Then he returned to the closet, and stood back in a corner, hidden by the warden's clothing.

There were eager voices under the window.

"Here's where he was working," answered some one. "Maybe he's hidden up there on the porch."

"He's too sharp for any of those tricks," answered another, but he climbed the ladder as he spoke and flashed a lantern through the window.

No. 19 watched it from his corner. If they came in through the window and searched the room — He pressed closer against the wall. The steps descended the ladder. The guards entered the hallway downstairs. There was a hurried opening and shutting of doors as they went through the formality of searching the warden's house. Tramp, tramp, upstairs the footsteps came, down the hallway to the door of the warden's room. No. 19 could hear them talking as they drew near.

"No sense in searching the warden's house," growled one. He pushed the door farther open as he spoke, and flashed the lantern in.

"Now, look here, Dennison," interrupted another, "I'm going to search this room thoroughly. We've made a farce of this thing, so far, and I believe in looking in unlikely places. I've a theory — "

"Hang your theory!" gruffly answered the first speaker.

"But I tell you I will search this room," rejoined the other.

"I've been in this business longer than you, and I guess I know — "

"Here, give me the light!"

No. 19 stood rigid. On that lantern his fate depended. There was a wavering of the light in the room; it brightened. The man in the warden's overcoat measured, with his eye, the distance to the open window.

'Bring the lantern down. There's been enough time wasted up there," called a voice of authority from the foot of the stairs.

The bearer of the lantern hesitated, grumbled something about mere formality; then the light receded, and No. 19 was left alone in the darkness.

When the house was quiet once more, he walked softly to the window. He looked down on the peaceful garden. Below, at the office, men hurried about, giving and receiving orders. From the watch tower over on the next hill the searchlight swept blinding white rays over the fields and roads, and he could see the

glitter of the barrels of the tower gatling-guns. There was a fascination in watching this preparation for his own capture, but this was not the time for such indulgence.

He stepped out upon the porch roof. He must descend the ladder quickly, before the searchlight swept the house. A moment he watched its wavering course. Would it turn to the right or the left? He climbed over the railing. The light flickered hither and thither. He reached the middle of the ladder. The brightness rested far away over the fields to the right. So far he was safe. Surely he could reach the ground before the light turned in his direction. Down he went over the few remaining rungs. Two rungs from the bottom and fortune still favored him. Then the great sword of light quivered, and shone full upon the warden's house.

The man on the ladder threw himself face downward at the foot of the rose vine. He lay breathless among the leaves for a second, though an age of a lifetime's emotions; then he raised his head slightly. The dazzling white light was still upon him. A feeling of utter hopelessness weighed him down. Once more his head sank upon his hands, and he lay waiting. The light seemed to rest heavily upon him, to crush out all energy and resistance.

After he had waited several minutes he turned over and sat up. The light had gone, and he was in darkness; one more chance had been given him. He rose and ran noiselessly down the terraces, keeping well in under the bushes. He did not take the path that led back to the hills, but headed straight for the road that led from the prison through a little village to the left.

He dropped over the last terrace wall into the road, just outside the village. He stopped running, took an easy stride, pulling his hat over his eyes, and with his hands thrust deep in his coat pockets, whistled softly as he walked down the middle of the road.

He went unhindered through the village. There were several outlying cottages to be passed — then he could take to his heels and be in the little fishing station in half an hour. A ferry boat stopped there on its way to the city, about four in the morning.

He hastened his steps as he approached the last house, and swung his arms freely. As he drew near he saw two forms at

the gate. They were talking quietly, but stopped as he came opposite them, and looked at him sharply. Involuntarily his whistling ceased, and despite his efforts he almost ran.

"Good-evening," called one of the men, in a challenging voice, taking a step towards him.

"Good-evening," he answered, in as careless a tone as he could assume. "You aren't joining in the search for No. 19. The doctor told me he had got away this afternoon."

"Oh, you're the friend that's staying with the doctor!" replied the man. "We're guarding this road, but there's no use in it. No one every tries to escape this way. They all take to the hills. Good-evening, sir."

No. 19 felt the sharp eyes of the other guard upon him as he hurried on. There was an eager whispering between the men behind him, then a quick exclamation.

"It can't possibly be," said the man who had addressed the fugitive. "You must have been mistaken in the voice."

A quick command interrupted him.

"No. 19, halt!"

No. 19 glanced once over his shoulder, and ran down the road, the two men in pursuit. He had a fifty-foot start of them, and he was running for his freedom. Two pistol bullets whizzed past him; then all was still save for the sound of running feet.

On they went in the starlight, following the curves of the road, past rocks and stunted trees. Here he was safe from the flashlight at least. Once the guards took a short cut and gained a few feet on him. With an effort he quickened his pace, and again widened the distance between them. He rounded a low hill, and the dark outlines of the wharf and the buildings about it were before him. That was his goal, that rickety old wharf, but what protection could it offer him? He glanced eagerly about. To the right the waters of the bay lapped the rocks, to the left a hill rose, sheer and steep. There was no choice, he must keep to the road.

The men back of him ran steadily and easily. He kept his pace with difficulty. The overcoat weighed more heavily as he advanced; lack of exercise began to tell on him, and he felt his strength going. Step by step the guards gained on him, till he could hear their hard breathing.

"Halt!" cried one. "Stop, or I'll shoot."

Still he stumbled on. As he reached the rough planks of the wharf a bullet went through his hat.

"Close enough, that time," a guard exclaimed. "The next one will bring him down. Can't let him drown, and he's crazy enough to try even that." He stopped as he spoke, and aimed at the staggering figure ahead. The crash of the weapon was followed by a rending of wood, and a hollow sounding splash under the planks. The wharf lay clear before them.

"Got him that time, but he's gone through the wharf. There's some nasty holes out there, and the boards are half rotten all round them," said the one who had fired the shot.

"Hurry up," cried his companion. "He'll yell when he comes up. They're all as afraid of the water as rats."

They ran carefully forward, for the wharf was dangerous. As they neared the spot where No. 19 had gone down, they saw a large jagged hole.

"This is the place," one whispered. "He ought to be up by this time."

They waited silently at the opening. The expected call for help did not come. There was no sound save the ceaseless sighing and gurgling of the water. Presently one of the guards lay down and peered into the darkness below. The black water rose and fell, with strange gray lights on it, like the reflection of white faces far below. He shuddered as he rose.

"He's had plenty of time to come up, if he's going to," said one, "if I haven't — "

"Yes," whispered his companion, "maybe he's — "

"I guess he is," answered the other. "Come, let's get out of this."

They walked hurriedly back over the road they had come. As they turned the first curve, a dripping figure drew itself slowly out of the hole. The man chafed his hands, stiff from clinging to the pile in the cold water. There was a bullet hole in the sleeve of the warden's overcoat. "Lucky I stumbled when he shot," he thought. "The warden's overcoat did the whole thing."

An hour later the guards reported the shooting and drowning of No. 19. The morning papers presented sensational accounts of it,

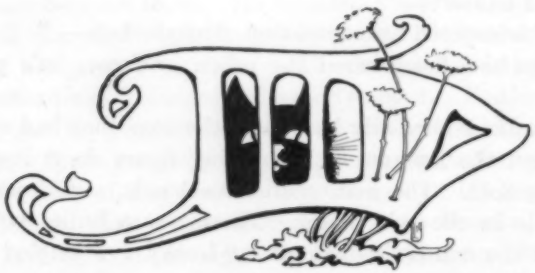
and orders were given to withdraw the men who had been set to watch the ferry boats as they landed in the city. No. 19 was no more.

. . . . . .

The warden's time expired, and he was once more a private citizen. He walked slowly though the outskirts of the city, enjoying his freedom. Nature had put too kind a heart in him to fit him for a prison officer. Life in sight of the prison walls had been irksome to him. What must it be within them?

His thoughts were interrupted by the sound of clipping on the other side of a garden wall. There was something familiar in its rhythm. He stopped and listened. One, two, three, four, five, the shears went, then from one to ten. The clipping ceased. A man rose from behind the hedge and faced him. He recognized No. 19.

The warden looked into the fearless face in front of him, long and silently. The two had met upon one of the unfamiliar by-paths of life. Vague thoughts of honor, justice, right and wrong skimmed through the warden's mind. This man before him had risked all for freedom; he had fought hard and won. Slowly an understanding of the love of liberty rose in his mind and faced and silenced all his doubts. He turned slowly and walked away. No. 19, watching him, knew that he had nothing to fear from the warden.



The Trade Rat Mine.*

BY EUSTACE V. BRAY.

IF the tourist or the tramp, straying from the direct route between Marysville and Oroville, chances to wander for a while along a well-defined trail on the banks of a brawling branch of the Feather River, he is pretty sure to come upon a weather-beaten cabin, and to be surprised by the singular object under a glass case that may be seen through its only window. Sometimes the curious traveller also gets a glimpse of the occupant of this lonely abode, a gaunt, bent old man, with hair and beard and shaggy brows of silvery whiteness.

But there is a kindly gleam in the honest blue eyes beneath those shaggy brows, undimmed even yet by the long years that have frosted the thin hair and patriarchal beard, and, attracted by the strange personality of the recluse and the romance of his surroundings, visitors have from time to time won his confidence sufficiently to draw from him the particulars that have become sublimated into the crystal of this strange story.

Horace Robb, though accustomed from boyhood to live and look out for himself, was by no means always a hermit, shunning his kind. He came to California in the early fifties — not a pioneer, but a follower in the track of the earliest searchers for gold. Youth, enthusiasm, restless energy and a determination to win a fortune for Her whom he had left behind were his incentives to untiring effort, but they did not bring success. The greater the endeavor, it seemed to him, the smaller the result. Now and again he found a color or two, just enough to keep him on the move.

Finally, tired, for the time, of roaming, he relocated an abandoned placer claim on this foaming branch of the Feather

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River, inheriting with it a deserted cabin and its meagre plenishing of rude table, stool and bunk, and rusty pots and pans. He straightened up the rickety door, cleared out the spring, and installed his stock of bacon, beans and potatoes. Then he settled down to days of weary tramping with pick and pan and nights of deep and dreamless sleep.

From the second day of his sojourn, Robb had found sticks, pebbles and other trash among his beans, and attributed the adulteration to a dishonest trader, but as the weeks went by the stock of beans diminished with alarming rapidity, while the refuse increased in proportion. Next the potato sack seemed filling up with rubbish also, and the potatoes went faster than he ate them.

One day, returning suddenly to the cabin for a forgotten implement, he surprised a great rat in the act of dragging a candle into a hole which Robb had supposed to be securely stopped, and the cause of the disappearance of his supplies became apparent. But the steady increase of sticks and stones was still a puzzle to him, until he recalled some of the queer tales told to him by miners of the Trade Rats that are said to be born with a sense of justice, and "cannot help trying to do the square thing."

Without stopping to theorize, he determined to put the matter to practical proof, and when he went to his next day's work he placed a tempting piece of bacon rind on the stump that served him as a sideboard, leaving the rat-hole still unstopped. When he came home at night the bacon was gone and in its place was a stone. Day after day he repeated the experiment, until it became a habit with him to put a remnant of griddle-cake or a bit of bacon or potato skin upon this stump, and invariably he found at night a chip or twig or pebble in place of the vanished scrap of food. It was a sort of barter in which the balance always showed on the wrong side of the ledger, but, by keeping his provisions in a crude, tin-lined locker of his own construction, and allowing the rat-hole to remain open, he not only preserved his own rations from molestation, but inspired the Trade Rat with such a sense of dependence and immunity that the big rodent made a practice of coming out of his hole in the quiet hours of candle-light, for a supplementary evening luncheon. Sitting up on his haunches, he

would wink his bright black eyes and wiggle his whiskers till the patient miner brought him a bit of food.

Things went on in this way for months, and the Trade Rat, now almost tame, was Robb's only companion and distraction in many a lonely hour. All this time he was getting no gold to speak of, his supplies were nearly gone, and the prospects were decidedly discouraging.

One morning — a clear, crisp California morning — Horace Robb put in the customary place on the stump a small fragment from his fast emptying larder and started out in search of his fortune just once more. He went to a different place, but there was no different result, and he returned to his cabin at the day's end as near to tears as a man of his make ever comes. Perfunctorily he prepared and ate the meal which he meant to be the last in that place, except a breakfast in the morning. Then as listlessly he lighted a candle. Its rays fell upon the stump where he had laid his last donation to the Trade Rat and sparkled upon a bright yellow nugget, about the size of a lima bean. His breath left him and then came back in gasps. There before his eyes was gold — the object of every hour's toil and hope — gold, brought to him without a stroke of labor!

He sat back on his stool, lighted his pipe at the candle, and smoked and thought. There was nobody camped within miles and miles of him; no trace of a wayfarer upon the ground within the cabin or without. There could be no doubt that the nugget had been placed there by the Trade Rat, and he watched for his pet's usual evening appearance almost as eagerly as if assured that the animal would reply to his anxious questions. But the creature did not come, and he stretched himself in his bunk.

Early in the morning he was up, investigating the rat-hole, which extended deep into the ground beyond the cabin wall. There was a little fresh gravel around the mouth of the hole that convinced Robb of the source from which the gold had come, and he went outside and with nervous speed dug straight down into the burrow, which he widened and deepened as he worked. About three feet from the surface he came upon as promising a bed of gravel as a placer miner ever saw. Fortune had surrendered to him at last!